

Mental Health Liaison Group

March 3, 2005

The Honorable Ted Strickland
U.S. Representative
336 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tim Murphy
U.S. Representative
322 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Strickland and Murphy:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group, representing patients, health professionals and family members, are pleased to support your legislation, the Medicare Mental Health Copayment Equity Act. Under your legislation, Medicare's historic discriminatory 50 percent coinsurance for outpatient mental health care would be reduced over six years to 20 percent, bringing the coinsurance into line with that required of Medicare beneficiaries for other Part B services.

Simply put, current law discriminates against Medicare beneficiaries who seek treatment for mental illness. This affects elderly and non-elderly Medicare beneficiaries alike when they seek mental health care. According to the 1999 U.S. Surgeon General's report on mental health, almost 20 percent of elderly individuals have some type of mental disorder uncommon in typical aging. In addition, elderly individuals have the highest rate of suicide in the U.S., often the result of depression. The Surgeon General's report states, "Late-life depression is particularly costly because of the excess disability that it causes and its deleterious interaction with physical health. Older primary care patients with depression visit the doctor and emergency rooms more often, use more medication, incur higher outpatient charges, and stay longer at the hospital."

The 50 percent coinsurance requirement also is unfair to the non-elderly disabled Medicare population. Because many of these individuals have severe mental illnesses combined with low incomes and high medical expenses, a 50 percent coinsurance obligation is a serious patient burden. For elderly and non-elderly Medicare beneficiaries alike, Medicare is a critical source of care. Your legislation to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries needing mental health care incur only the same cost-sharing obligations as required of all other Medicare patients would end the statutory discrimination against Medicare beneficiaries seeking treatment for mental disorders.

Thank you for your leadership in addressing this important issue for the nation's 40 million Medicare patients.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association of Children's Residential Centers

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers

American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association of Practicing Psychiatrists
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Federation
Clinical Social Work Guild
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD)
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Mental Health Association
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA